

Traditional Institutions Responses to Youths Radicalisation in North West States, Nigeria, 1999-C.2025

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Abstract: This study examines the responses of traditional institutions to youth radicalisation in the north-west States of Nigeria from 1999 to c.2025. It explores how autochthonous governance structures, rooted in monarchical systems and Islamic jurisprudence, have historically mediated conflicts and curtailed youth restiveness. Drawing on Social Contract and Primordialist theories, the study adopts a historical methodology, utilising primary and secondary sources to analyse the evolution, challenges, and effectiveness of traditional institutional mechanisms within the context of democratic governance. Findings reveal that while traditional institutions successfully employed customary strategies such as mediation, fines, banishment, and local vigilante groups (e.g., 'Yan-sakai, Yan-banga, 'Yan-sintiri, and 'Yan-tauri) to curb radicalisation, their influence was progressively undermined by colonial indirect rule, post-independence political marginalisation, and the fragility of democratic governance post-1999. The study identifies key triggers of youth radicalisation, including socio-economic inequalities, political exploitation, arms proliferation, and inadequate state presence in rural areas. It concludes that a genuine reinvigoration of traditional institutions, integrated with modern governance frameworks and grassroots community engagement, is essential for sustainable peace and deradicalisation in the region. The study recommends enhanced synergy between traditional rulers and state authorities, youth inclusion in governance, and the revitalisation of customary justice and educational systems to address underlying grievances and prevent extremist recruitment.

Keywords: Responses, Traditional Institutions, Youths, Radicalisation, North West Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Unassumingly, the strategies for securing, brokering control and coordination of conflicts and their resolution since antiquity in West African society have been traditional in nature and dimension. This is because preponderant conflicts and squabbles among peoples are fundamentally traditional, and the use of orthodox means remains sacrosanct. In the contemporary period, the re-emphasis on the use of traditional institutions' responses to insecurity has continued to attract the attention of scholars, media, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, individuals, and government in north-west Nigeria. Based on this, this study underscores a treatise on the chequered traditional institutions' responses to youth radicalisation in north-west States, Nigeria, from 1999 to c.2025. The north-west States of Nigeria encompass Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, and Jigawa States, where the Sarakunas (kings) broker control and coordinate their administrative affairs with a

synthesised traditional institution cum modern governance system. Mukhtar and Jafaru (2025, pp.1-2) affirm that there was the recognition and incorporation of traditional institutions, which include local authorities such as emirs, district heads, village chiefs, religious leaders, and community elders, who have traditionally served as guardians of peace, ethics, and community development. Embedded in customary laws and indigenous knowledge systems, traditional institutions have played a vital role in conflict mediation, land governance, inter-group dialogue, and community engagement.

The precision for the choice of the periods is very pertinent; the former aligns with the emergence of democratic governance, while the latter manifests the peak of landmark deterioration in traditional institutions' responses to youth radicalisation in the study area. Adam (2011, p.11) upholds that youths are the most energetic

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and productive segment of society, and if taken for granted will certainly be the 'last straw that will break the camel's back'. Historically, traditional institutions' responses to youth radicalisation in north-west States, Nigeria, since the precolonial period were monarchical in nature, actively coordinated by *Sarakuna* (kings) and immensely assisted by subaltern chiefs such as the *Waziri* (viceroys), *Galadima* (palace officer), *Yari* (comptroller of prison), and *Alkali* (judge), among others (Aminu, 2025; Last, 1976). Indubitably, in response to youth radicalisation, autochthonous conflict resolution strategies such as lashes with a cudgel or horse tail, fines, and banishment of offenders were adduced. This trajectory was utilised to strengthen peace and harmonious relations in the territories that subsequently advanced to north-west States, Nigeria, in the 20th century. Albeit, youths' restiveness and radicalisation in the precolonial period of what subsequently became the north-west States were traditional in nature and dimension, and were solved through autochthonous strategies of the rulers. Responses were equally sustained up to the emergence of Islamic reformist jihadists' machination, orchestrated by triumvirate leaders from 1804 to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1809 (Ikime, 1980; Adeyemi, 2023). Consequently, the Islamic revolution usurped the extant primordial polity by bolstering considerable support for a genuine Islamic traditional institution that derived its laws and principles from the glorious Qur'an, Hadith, and Ijma (consensus of Ulama). Instructively, the traditional institutions' structure in the north-west States of Nigeria is monarchical in nature, with the *Sarki* (king) brokering control and coordination of the helm of administrative and political affairs.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the northern Nigeria area was extricated from precolonial administration through forceful subjugation by the British imperialists, who churned out a pristine colonial polity in 1900 (Siollun, 2021; Ogundiya & Amzat, 2012). The system was antithetical to the extant traditional institutional design and system, with slight modification and complementation of autochthonous and modern polity. This marked another periodic transformation in polity that shrank the power of traditional institutions with an adulterated system of governance embedded in an indirect system inundated with what Crowder (1978) described as the 'philosophy of divide and rule'. The synergy of traditional and colonial polity strategies strengthened positive responses for the curtailment of youth radicalisation up to the British onslaughts and subjugation of northern Nigeria in 1903, which churned out a pristine 'indirect rule' colonial system of administration (Schraeder, 2004; Siollun, 2021) that indirectly shrank and immersed the extant indigenous power for exploitation. Very significantly, traditional institutions have been very crucial in preserving social cohesiveness, law and order, and settling conflicts, as strongly ingrained in local communities (Ojo-Ebenezer, 2023). For instance, in

north-west States of Nigeria, institutions like elders, councils, and traditional rulers have access to a plethora of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices explored in brokering control, coordination, and management of violent conflicts. Due to their proximity and familiarity, the *Sarakuna* (traditional rulers) enjoy legitimacy and trust among community members, which in consequence accelerates effectiveness in youth radicalisation conflict resolution strategies.

With the transition to democracy in 1999 (Maier, 2002; Decker, 2016), the north-west States of Nigeria experienced dreadful youth radicalisation in exponential multidimensions and degrees through the neglect, marginalisation, and ultimate exploitation of youths' credulities. These deplorable conditions were precipitated by political gladiators, economic inequalities, social imbalances, sophisticated corruption and poverty, and an asymmetrical governance system in the north-west States, Nigeria. Furthermore, in 2011, these inadequacies plunged the north-west States into unwarranted youth radicalisation hovering around Hausa-farmers and Fulani-herdsmen, cattle rustling, kidnappings, religious bigotry, and armed banditry (Aminu, Bello, Jimoh, & Fadeyi, 2023). From 2011 to 2025, youth radicalisation reached its peak, and traditional institutions' responses resolved into the utilisation of local vigilante groups including the '*Yan-sakai* and *Askarawa* (Zamfara State), *Yan-banga* (Kaduna State), '*Yan-sintiri* (Kano State), and '*Yan-tauri* (local hunters in Sokoto and Kebbi States), among others. In retrospect, Nigerian erstwhile political leaders and nationalists are mostly within the age category of youths; they struggled for decolonisation that spawned the end of British colonial rule in 1960 and 1963 (Nwankwo, 1975) as well as the development of other meaningful projects in the subsequent years (Maier, 2002; Decker, 2016).

Based on the foregoing prism, the chapter is segmented into different phases of discourse; firstly, the introduction presents the general overview; followed by the demystification of youth, traditional institution, youth radicalisation, and the nexus between radicalisation and response. A section within the chapter appraises social contract and primordial theories, which aided the interpretation of the complex phenomenon. Other sections contextualise the geographical realm of the north-west States, while the triggering forces and typologies of youth radicalisation are discussed. Another apposite section construes traditional institutions' responses to youth radicalisation in the north-west States, 1999-2025, the re-emphasis of traditional institutions' potential values in radicalisation in the north-west, and finally the conclusion.

Demystifying Perspectives on Youth, Traditional Institutions, and Youth Radicalisation

This section of the study provides conceptual insights into essential variables for the

phenomenological understanding of the whole gamut of the chapter. Their intrinsic values created an unbridled ambience for the constructability of expositions that provide the leeway to general discourse of the phenomenon in question.

Contextualising the Youth

The term 'youth' is conceptually subject to variegated understandings contingent on historical and contemporary socio-economic and political issues and conditions that necessitate its usage. Based on the foregoing assertion, distinct nations employ multivariate parameters and variables in defining their youth. In a wide-ranging sense, youth refer to people who have energy, vigour, and enthusiasm to get things done. Youth is demystified as a state of mind, not a function of age; a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, and an insatiable appetite for progressive reasoning. Nigeria's youth development policy affirms youth to be between the age categories of 18 and 35, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (National Youth Policy, 2001, p. 3). According to Nasidi (2014), in order to unravel the assumed social status and sense of powerlessness systematically attached to youth, it abruptly becomes its own social institution beatified with its own certain rules and regulations as well as cultural claims. According to the United Nations Programme on Youth (n.d, p. 2), youth is he that floats dexterously between 15-25 years of age. The youth sometimes possess a major and formidable character that stands to bridge the gaps that exist between the dependency of childhood or adolescence and the independent 'freedom' of adulthood.

Most significantly, young people between the ages of 15-24 represent approximately 18% of the global population, nearly 1.2 billion people (United Nations Programme on Youth, p. 3). Again, the African Charter (National Youth Policy, 2019-2023 Nigeria) recognises youth as people between 15-35 years, and that Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with one of the largest populations of youth in the world, comprising 33,625,424 members. However, Goselle (2019) underscored that 87% of youth live in developing countries, 62% in Asia, and 17% of them live in Africa. In a similar vein, Dahiru Yahya demystifies youth as a person who is abreast of contemporary issues and is growing with them. It is not a question of age or knowledge, but a question of consciousness; therefore, a young person can be a youth and an old man can also be a youth (The Grandeur of Liberation Magazine, 2015, p.1). This is why the Nigerian youth leader of the largest political party in Africa is above fifty (50) years. In a nutshell, youth could be described as a potentially destabilising force, vulnerable to conflicts and lacking the intellectual knowledge and wisdom to rule a country, and are predominantly in African countries.

Insights on Traditional Institutions

The application of traditional institution mechanisms is not independently limited to the lexicon of African societies. It also gained cognisance and ascendancy in various societies of the world, and up to this period, it continues to subsist and co-exist with modern governing structures both in developing and developed countries. In Europe, specifically in England, traditional institutions are regarded as the monarch (kings and royal chiefs, dukes, etc.), and in African societies, particularly in Nigeria, they are construed as Emirs, Obas, Council of Elders, Chiefs and Baale (mayor), among others. These institutions are widely recognized for their majestic nature and cultural ambiances (Okpevra, 2023). Globally, the hallmark of traditional institutions is in governance, cultural preservation and conflict resolution. In other words, traditional institutions are repositories of cultural practices, rituals, and symbols that define a community's distinct identity, providing frameworks for leadership, authority, and decision-making within communities. Therefore, in the words of Beall and Ngonyama (2009) as cited in Okpervra (2023), traditional institutions are the formal and informal rules, norms, and values that humans created, and have the authority to impose. They have the capacity to make choices based on these rules and values. In conventional senses, traditional institutions have been very crucial in preserving social cohesiveness, keeping order, and settling conflicts since they are strongly ingrained in local communities (Ojo-Ebenezer, 2023). It is apposite to understand that due to their proximity and familiarity, traditional institutions relish legitimacy and trust among community members; this however increases their effectiveness as dispute resolution techniques (Osaghae, 2007).

Traditional institutions or rulers are the heritage of customary laws, leadership roles, and communal practices that guide decision-making and conflict resolution within local communities. The fundamental purpose of institutions is to protect the customs and traditions of the populace and to use the laws and conventions of the populace as a tool to resolve disputes that may arise within or between groups of people (Akpabio, 2022). In agreement, traditional institutions to Obioha (2018) encompass the ancestral practices, leadership structures, and customary laws that regulate social relationships, dispute resolution, and governance within indigenous groups. By and large, in no small measure, these institutions contribute to the maintenance of social order, justice, and harmony by upholding established norms and resolving disputes through consensus-based mechanisms (Mboh, 2021). Suleiman and Sani (2026) further illuminate that philosophical reflections embedded in Hausa traditional occupational chieftaincies reveal the deep moral and social values that underpin these institutions, while their subsequent work (Suleiman & Sani, 2025) traces how changing criteria in the conferment of occupational titles reflect the dynamic

interplay between heritage and modern influence in sustaining traditional authority.

By and large, traditional institutions refer to long-established indigenous frameworks of authority, governance, and social regulation that existed prior to the influence of colonial powers. These institutions are generally founded on ethnic, cultural, or religious principles and are frequently represented by leaders such as emirs, chiefs, district heads, councils of elders, and spiritual figures. In the context of Northwest Nigeria, these entities play a vital role in community dynamics and hold considerable sway over social behaviour, intergroup relations, dispute resolution, and local resource management (Shehu, 2022; Mukhtar & Jafaru, 2025). The above conceptual rhetorics are a similitude of what were obtainable and evident in north-west States, Nigeria in the period under review.

Construing Radicalisation and Responses

Conceptually, the 'Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2012)' underscores radicalisation as a process of "making people to accept new and different ideas, especially ideas about complete social and political change". However, radicalism is contextually applied to interactive experience, which implies a desire for social change through strategic approaches such as either through dialogue, aggressive protests, or militancy as applicable to different ethno-nationalist groupings under study.

In addition, radicalisation is a process of change in which non-violent individuals come to endorse and promote violent activity. As terrorism expert Brian Michael Jenkins, cited by Ezzarqui (2010), states that "terrorists do not fall from the sky; they emerge from a set of strongly held beliefs that are radicalised". In radicalisation, individuals are drawn to killing their fellow citizens through acts of terrorism because their beliefs and grievances have been exploited to become a living force to carry out such attacks. Ezzarqui cites Rohan Gunaratna, a renowned international terrorism expert, as having remarked that "individuals are ideologically driven, and not operationally driven." By this, radicalisation requires that the individual enters a mental process that is transformative, with a personal change that conditions him to violent behaviour. In other words, "radicalisation comprises internalizing a set of beliefs, a militant mind-set that embraces violent jihad (crusade) as the paramount test of one's conviction". For instance, the growing number of detainees in jails, most particularly of violent extremists, contributes to further entrenching radicalisation among inmates, providing a safe haven for recruitment and development of the jihadists' narrative. It should be noted that radicalisation and extremism are complex, multifaceted opportunities that have been successfully exploited by terrorist groups in spreading their ideology, even among the most disenfranchised segments of the population throughout the world.

In a nutshell, radicalisation is a process by which an individual or group adopts extreme political, social, or religious ideals that reject the status quo, undermine contemporary ideas regarding freedom of choice and expression, and condone violence to achieve ideological ends, including undertaking terrorist acts (Sodipo, 2013). It typically starts with changes in one's self-identification. Grievances frequently driven by personal or group concerns regarding local issues as well as international events fuel this change.

In conventional conflict resolution strategies, responses to insecurity, fundamentally youths' restiveness and radicalisation, are churned out with the ill-conditions that birth them. Therefore, responses to youths' radicalisation in north-west States of Nigeria could be deciphered in numerous conflict resolution stages by traditional institutions' strategies wrapped in kinetic and non-kinetic formations. Albeit, from 1999 to 2025, the baton of traditional institution responses to youth radicalisation has been morphed and immersed by the overbearing dominance of democratic polity in north-west States of Nigeria. Unlike formal government structures that are based on codified laws and bureaucratic systems, traditional institutions operate through unwritten norms, community consensus, and historical practices. Their authority stems from cultural legitimacy and lineage, positioning them as pivotal to community identity and cohesion (Logan, 2009). Such institutions often intervene in familial disputes, land conflicts, inheritance matters, and decisions regarding community development. Their deep-rooted connection to local social frameworks allows them to respond promptly and effectively, especially in situations where state mechanisms may be regarded as sluggish, detached, or lacking legitimacy (Yahaya & Olanrewaju, 2023). For instance, from 1999 prior to the emergence of armed banditry in 2011 as a form of youths' radicalisation in the north-west States, resolution was carried out as most insecurity domiciled in rural communities was firstly resolved through traditional institutions.

Postulating Social Contract Theory and Primordialist Theory

Unassailably, the adoption and use of the theories have been very tremendously helpful as a major component to understand and interpret complex phenomena. For discernible comprehension, this study adopts the utilisation of Social Contract and Primordialist theories; they are emplaced as a premise to construe 'traditional institutions responses to youths' radicalisation in north-west States, Nigeria from 1999 to c.2025'. The former creates agreement, while the latter demonstrates the staunch inclination of people's loyalty to their ancestral community or group, and how they ultimately influence human obeisance to their constituted authority.

The Social Contract theory gains strong ascendancy and considerable support in the polemic writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and they are invariably referred to as contractualists. It is the most famous postulation regarding the origin of the State, and its substance is contingent on the State which is the result of an agreement entered into by men who originally had no governmental organisation and structure. In the first period, there was no government and no law, and people lived in a state of nature; albeit after some time they decided to set up a State by means of a contract. Invariably, Social Contract theory described the original condition of men as the 'state of nature', and to escape from that condition, man-made agreement as Social Contract.

In a different clime, some viewed the contract as a pre-social, and to others it was a pre-political agreement. They unanimously agreed on the point that the state of nature preceded the establishment of government, as there was no organised life in the state of nature and people lived according to their own wishes and fancies. In this social ambience, no man-made laws were there to control man; might was right, hence the law known to men living in the state of nature was the law of nature or natural law. Most complex was that there was none to interpret the law or adjudicate, hence men lived under uncertain conditions. When men felt the need to escape from this type of life, they did so by common agreement or contract. As a result of this, a civil society was created, which thus preceded the emergence of the State. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the cohorts of the Social Contract theory multiplied and there was more or less universal acceptance of the doctrine.

On a sound reality, the application of Social Contract theory in relation to the phenomenon in discourse is highly appropriate to the systemic formation of the State and traditional institutions toward governance. In the cultural history of indigenous African communities, the institution of traditional leadership has succeeded in maintaining its reputation and continues to play a very active role as custodian of the culture, customs, origins, and history of its people (Julie, 2024). In a nutshell, moral and political obligations are founded on an implicit agreement among individuals to form a society, trading natural freedoms for security and order.

The primordialist theorists as demystified by Burton and Sandole (1986) depict dependable attachments or loyalty that are concerned with fundamental human demand for identity in terms of community memberships, or what invariably could be underscored as identity groupings. The theorists affirm that larger and more complicated communities are more likely to have individuals who are unable to directly satisfy their desire for identification, and who instead turn to a metaphorical portrayal of it, such as associational sentiment. Again, primordial paradigm

theorists further argue that conflict resolution involves, among other things, the disputants or conflicting parties discovering or inventing new descriptions, either alone or with third party assistance. This is a process which reflects "a multi and not a unidimensional theoretical orientation" (Burton & Sandole 1986: p.337). In the new modes for resolving ethnic conflicts, there must be a search for new metaphors that would serve as links between ethnic groups and their historic culture, which is their past social identity.

Central to Social Contract and Primordialist theories, the duo bolstered tremendous support in the articulation and initiation of governance for protection, invariably the curtailment and containment of youths' deradicalisation by complementing through the divine rights. Their interpretations impliedly assert government's legitimacy on securing and protecting citizen rights within whatever social and political milieu. This is necessary as virtually all social groups in Africa do, to a large measure, have one foothold in the modern world and another in their traditional culture. By extension, it is reasonable to affirm that some serious intercourse permeates with the past traditional social behaviour of one's social group that seems to characterise youth radicalisation in north-west States of Nigeria.

Contextualising the Geographical Realm of North-West States, Nigeria

The geographical realms of north-west States of Nigeria are extracted as a component part of diverse land with rich natural potentialities, beautiful climate, rich culture, and fertile grassland to mention a few (Abdulqadir, Usman, Shaba, & Saidu, 2013, pp.748-57). The region is located within the Nigerian entity, from the west coast of Africa at "latitude 4' and 14' east of the Greenwich Meridian (13); sharing a border with the Gulf of Guinea (Atlantic Ocean) to the south; the Benin Republic to the west; Cameroon to the east; and Chad and the Niger Republic to the north. Northern Nigeria, to be specific, is at a latitude of 11° 19' 48" (11.330) north, longitude of centre 6° 53' 24" (6.890) (13,14) (Ibid). As the scope of this study, the north-western States of Nigeria encompass seven (7) States, namely; Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi.

It could be accentuated that, due to the wide expanse of the north-west States, its analysis is situated within the geographical/border bounds of the States. For examples, these border areas of Illela and Gada borders in Sokoto State; Kongolam and Koza in Katsina State; and Jibia Kawarin-Kudi and Maigatari borders in Jigawa State are ubiquitously and profoundly affected territories or States. Basically, these borders with their alignments as international borders with the Niger Republic assisted positively in exiting out of Nigerian territory through irregular or undocumented migrations. Therefore, it is relevant to note that the north-west States remain the centripetal force for activities of irregular migration of people that ultimately leads to exacerbation of

instabilities in northern Nigeria with high rates of youths' radicalisation of all kinds.

Triggering Forces and Typologies of Youth Radicalisation in North-West States, Nigeria

Incontrovertibly, youth radicalisations are varied from distinct transitional landmarks or phenomenal events, ranging from precolonial, through the colonial, and postcolonial epochs. Their triggering forces, typologies, and propensity are determined by the underlying predisposing conditions and inherent forces within the social and political milieu of north-west States, Nigeria. In some cases, youths' radicalisation from 1999 to 2025 is radically multivariate, but they manifest their ugly heads in the strides to correct anomalies, or usurp asymmetrical governance approaches antithetical to youths' yearnings and aspirations. In fact, there has been an overabundance of both external and internal triggering forces of youths' radicalisation actualised through non-State actors in combatant and non-combatant strategies.

Primarily among the triggering forces was Nigeria's transition to democratic polity in 1999; this made the north-west States part of the pristine transformative polity. With democracy on its toll, the youths experienced accelerated dreadful humiliation in exponential dimensions and degrees arising from neglect and marginalisation across gender. This idea hinged on the exploitation of youths' credulities to satisfy political stalwarts' self-aggrandisement and objectives, which in the long run extirpated youths' relative peace within the society of residents in north-west States, Nigerian society. In addition, these ill-conditions were predisposed by political gladiators, which in the ultimate birthed the social imbalances and inequalities that extremely pushed the youth to find solace in radicalisation. However, from 1999 through 2011 up to 2025, these inadequacies plunged the north-west States into different typologies of unwarranted youths' radicalisation hovering around cattle rustling, kidnappings, armed banditry, and gender-based sexual violence (GBSV). For instance, they exploited the advantage of the socio-economic ill-condition of the area, a factor which brought about the emergence of contemporary religious ideological Lakurawa groups in Kebbi and Sokoto States.

From the incipient stage, youths' radicalisation was triggered by accelerating increases in Hausa-farmers and Fulani-herdsmen pugnacities that subsequently metamorphosed into violent conflicts and kidnappings in Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto and Katsina States. Though it was presumed a prolonged historic dispute, simply addressed within the traditional purview of conflict resolution, between 2011 and 2023 it remained an uncontrollable number of youths involved. The herdsmen who could not recover their cattle, or obtain justice from the States' judiciary, tempted to engage in reprisal attacks, hence the escalation of youth

radicalisation. However, the youths found solace in untrammelled kidnapping of persons for ransom to supplant lost cattle.

A pertinent triggering force is the increase in small and light weapons (SALWs) arising from multifarious factors, such as the end of the Cold War in 1989/1990, the Libyan crisis, and the resulting free flow of firearms in the wake of Moammar Gadhafi's death, gun running, and local politics, among others, made possible through Nigeria's porous borders. However, the increasing availability of modern weapons supplied by powerful interests in order to advance their parochial causes through sponsored violence triggered youth radicalisation (Seddon & Sumberg, 2017). For instance, arms proliferation and its availability have undoubtedly exacerbated the conflict between farmers and herders and increased the number of casualties (UNEP, 2011 cited in Cabot, 2011). It is significant to note that out of an estimated 640 million SALWs in circulation worldwide, 100 million are estimated to be in Africa, about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa, 8 million in West Africa alone, with 70% of these found in Nigeria (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017). Unlike in the past when herders were known to carry cudgels, in contemporary Nigeria they are often found with sophisticated weapons, particularly AK 47s, while local crop farmers and militia groups are also armed.

Again, the emergence of some political group(s) and conflict entrepreneurial informants is another triggering force of youth radicalisation; the perpetrators eked out a living or livelihood from the deplorable democratic situation in north-west States. The uncouth democratic ambiances are birthed by a fragile and asymmetric governance system that poised for the subversive political elements who created avenues and opportunities for acquisition of resources and wealth through inordinate ambitions. It is noteworthy that their activities are not run, or coordinated in isolation of the youths' vibrancy, as most radical ideas are contingent on their staunchness, brawniness and vulnerability to conflict of whatever sort. Their activities are actually promoted through self-assured innate minds, and their complex nature towards adapting to unfavourable conditions, hence the nurturing and triggering of radical influences. Besides, the youth sometimes act covertly under the closed supervision and sponsorship of political gladiators, orchestrated to achieve targeted uncouth objectives.

An axiomatic fact worthy in triggering youth radicalisation is the unbridled consumption of lethal drugs and other narcotics, which is highly widespread in the north-west States of Nigeria. According to Aminu, Alhassan, & Ibrahim (2023), between 1999 and 2021, abound evidence emanated from law enforcement agencies depicted illicit consumption of lethal drugs and other substances as responsible for myriads of militias, insurgencies and armed banditry truculence in Nigeria. It

is also emphasised that this pattern of human life breeds such a dangerous mind of aggressive frustration that poises many people, especially to be vulnerable to illicit acts (Fatima, 2017). The foregoing duo assertions align with the conviction that overbearing consumption of controlled and restricted drugs and narcotics precipitates a triggering force for youths' radicalisation as it influences human stimulation. Sani and Bakura (2025) further emphasise that idleness and illiteracy, exacerbated by unemployment, serve as significant catalysts for crime and banditry, thereby reinforcing the vulnerability of youths to radicalisation in Northwestern Nigeria.

Furthermore, a triggering force for youths' radicalisation domiciles in excruciating poverty and sophisticated corruption, swiftly aggravated by obvious wasteful spending by politicians, affluents, and some government officials. The consequences of these illicit actions subject many youths in the north-west States to avaricious conditions, where the quest for money and wealth is either through youth radicalised means such as kidnapping, armed banditry, illegal artisanal gold mining, and ritualism. Some of these youths are incorporated into strong syndicates in the transportation of weapons, and also acted as agents or informants for kidnappers or armed bandits. Poignantly, the source of these uncalled situations points to the British colonial imperialists' mentalities injected into Nigeria during the epochal domination. It is avowed that African groups clashed or lost their administrative power and status in two strands of historical events; firstly, through their encounter with colonialism. This was when several tribal nations in Africa were arbitrarily amalgamated into new nation-States, and subjected to alien political and social rules and controls. Secondly, there was the immense post-colonial experience which suppressed age-old traditions, forcing many of them into cultural bankruptcy (Schraeder, 2024). However, Africa lost those features of traditional political cultures that many African groups regarded as impeccable avenues for addressing social needs, hence the unbridled radicalisation. Sarkin Gulbi, et al., (2024) affirm that insights from actors directly involved in banditry reveal the complex interplay of economic deprivation, governance failure, and community dynamics that fuel youth radicalisation in Nigeria's North West. Undoubtedly, from 1999 to 2025, many youths readily took recourse to conflict behaviour and radicalisation to make their pains, yearnings, and aspirations noted in north-west States of Nigeria.

Traditional Institutions' Responses to Youth Radicalisation in North-West States of Nigeria, 1999-2025

Since the precolonial, through the colonial and post-colonial periods, traditional institutions with their subaltern chiefs have advanced a number of surfeit ways of responding to insecurity in their respective realms. Even with the British colonial incursion and emasculation of the autochthonous powers with

modifications and hybridised governance systems, their responses still subsist in the rural or grassroots communities. Howbeit, with the British colonial vestiges bequeathed in the north-west States, traditional institutions' propinquity to their jurisdictions as the 'chief security' can never be oversimplified as they continue to strengthen responses to youths' radicalisation in the study periods as follows:

1. Traditional Institutions and Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:

What subsequently became the north-west States as a component part of Nigeria from antiquity utilises traditional institutions' mechanisms positively in response to youths' radicalisation. This has also been in operation with the emergence of democratic government in 1999, but coordinated with minimal impact contingent on democratic highhandedness. As paramount rulers and chief securities of their socio-cultural and political milieux, the subaltern chiefs are incorporated in hearing cases, adducing deliberations, and making genuine determinations as most conflict phenomena are traditional in nature. Across all north-west States, the institutions were actively coordinated by Sarakunas (kings) and immensely assisted by subaltern chiefs such as the Waziri (viceroy), Galadima (palace officer), Yari (comptroller of prison), and Alkali (judge), among others (Aminu & Bello, 2025, pp. 17-37). In responses to youths' radicalisation, the prevalent reliance on verbal negotiations, reparations, and elder mediations is done prior to, and after conflict escalation (Mohammed, 2024, pp.80-106). These traditional approaches prioritise reconciliation and social harmony over punitive responses. "When a conflict arises, we do not hastily go to court. The village head gathers both parties and elders to meet under the tree. They will converse until they reach an acceptable solution for both parties." (Youth Representative, Zamfara) This culturally grounded, non-adversarial approach promotes community unity, especially in post-conflict situations.

2. Democracy and Traditional Institutions Governance:

From 1999, and piercing through 2011 up to 2025, traditional institutions under their varied rulers and democratic political dispensations have adopted kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to responses. With the incorporation and submergence of traditional institutions governance to modern polity, a strong synergistic relation was espoused, which thus instigated the deployment of local vigilantes' tact as a defensive response to curb the scourge of youths' radicalisation. This strategic response is clothed around distinct nomenclatures in rural communities vulnerable to youths' radicalisation, especially in ungoverned forest areas of the north-west States of Nigeria. This idea was facilitated through persistent clarion calls to the government using kinetic measures such as Operation Mesa in 2014, Operation Sharan-Daji in late 2014, Operation Harbin Kunama in July 2016, Operation

Hadarin Daji, and Operation Fasan Yamma in 2024 to date, among others (Mohammed, 2024). The non-kinetic mechanism constitutes the utilisation of diplomatic strategy which included series of negotiations introduced by traditional rulers with the stern approval of the governments of the north-west States. Mohammed (2026) opined that these indigenous rulers under the aegis of traditional institutions orchestrated firm responses in their respective socio-political milieu. The traditional institution in Zamfara State bolstered considerable sway towards the curtailment and containment of youths' radicalism through the established Askarawa - invariably Community Protection Guards (CPGs) - inaugurated on the 31st December, 2025. This obviously complements the ongoing fights against youths' involvement in armed banditry onslaughts in Zamfara State. A similar mechanism was equally staged by Katsina State's government, hence the relative peace in youths' radicalisation in the State. The robust synergy by autochthonous rulers and modern governance is a conviction of collective strategy as most youths' radicalisations are rooted in the rural communities.

3. Traditional Institutions and Religious Responses to Youth Radicalisation:

Islam has been the prevailing and monolithic religion, a fundamental unifying force, and a factor in arbitration of matters defined and decided by traditional institutions in north-west States of Nigeria. It is avowed that religion and political rules were so intertwined that it was difficult to differentiate. Obedience to law and authority rested largely on the divine power of the rulers in the sacredness of immemorial institutions (Ramaswamy, 2006, p.174). Their functional roles have assisted immensely in the determination of cases against youths' radicalisation as laws are conveniently deduced from the glorious Qur'an, Hadiths, and the Ijma - an articulate consensus of the Ulama (Islamic clerics). These provenance of law and the determination of cases by the judiciary poised for a synergistic relation that permeates between the traditional rulers as the custodians of autochthonous polity. Islam as a centripetal force cum traditional institutions utilises its instrumentalities; these include the subaltern chiefs under the auspices of the Sarki or Emir with the Alkali - as judge - taking a superseding role. The Alkali performs functional roles contingent on his wealth of knowledge and experiences that have tactfully aided the containment and curtailment of youth indecent behaviour. However, from 1999 to 2025, traditional institutions have taken stern rules culminating in adducing punitive measures such as fines, imprisonment, banishment, among others.

4. Traditional Institutions in Early Warning System and Responses on Youth Radicalisation:

Incontrovertibly, from 1999 to 2025, abound records affirm youth exuberance, agility, and brawn nature as the centripetal force in the exhibition of youths' radicalisation in its nature and dimension. By this, youths

responded negatively to unyielding and unfavourable changes, government policies, and decisions incongruous to their yearnings and aspirations, or invariably sponsored and exploited by political gladiators in north-west States, Nigeria. It is noteworthy that the preponderance of youths' radicalisations is mostly orchestrated in rural communities, and hence cascaded to the urban regions. In responses, traditional institutions leaders as the 'chief security' of the respective geographical, socio-cultural, and administrative domains leverage their proximity to people for intelligence gathering, among others. This strategy tremendously poised for accessibility to community members in divulging pertinent security and intelligence information. This, in the ultimate, assisted in the preparation of a sound basis to trickle-down any youths' radicalisation prior to its escalation. Through this approach, proactive mechanisms are churned out in readiness for what might happen using the local Yan-Daba or Yan-Farauta (hunters) and the local vigilante groups for curtailment and containment of youth restiveness. In addition, due to their closeness to the society, the potential strength to spot rising tension in the early stage was seized through traditional institutions' robust interaction with delegated power to subaltern chiefs. In responses to youths' misdemeanour and radicalisation, the traditional rulers as the vicegerencies on earth collaborate with security agencies to share intelligence instrumental to tackling armed banditry and other criminalities.

5. Democratic Polity and Traditional Conflict Mediation and Resolution:

The initialisation of democratic polity in 1999 in north-west States, Nigeria is a centripetal force in harnessing insecurity challenges in the rural communities. This seems to be a polity with the potentiality to cascade governance to the grassroots areas as an aesthetic continuum for implementation of traditional institutions' responses toward mitigation, or mortification of youths' radicalism. With democratic polity, their responses are directed through the local authorities such as Emirs, district heads, village chiefs, religious leaders, and community elders who are closer to the community youths. They serve as a major vanguard and guardians for peace and ethics to prevail in varied communities using the subaltern chiefs because of their proximity to most crimes perpetrated. These functional responses are embedded in customary laws and indigenous knowledge systems they exhibited in execution of numbers of activities within their socio-political milieu. The traditional institutions' nearness to governance and to the grassroots communities plays no small measure. In corroboration of their judicial responses, Zartman (2000) and Ekeh (2016) extolled that their vital roles are manifested in conflict mediation, land governance, inter-group dialogue, and community engagement. In many rural regions of north-west States of Nigeria, traditional leaders continue to enjoy a level of legitimacy and trust that formal institutions often lack,

particularly in areas where State authorities are either weak or disputed. For instance, in Zamfara State, ungoverned forest areas Sububu, Kamuku, and Dubumra link with Katsina State, hence facilitating easy escape of culprits. In the north-west States, traditional institutions under their varied designated offices trickle-down the scourge of youths' radicalisation using the inter and intra cultural relations of affinal communities for de-escalation of violent pugnacity.

6. Engagement in Deradicalisation and Reintegration Supports:

In responding to the rising tides and intensities of insecurity emanating from youth radicalisation, traditional institutional leaders tenaciously worked towards curtailment and containment in numbers of approaches. Through series of negotiated agreements, traditional rulers under their institutions tend to reintegrate erring members of the communities essentially to mitigate the recurrence of any dastardly act, or its increment in the north-west States. This is enormously bolstered through long-established tradition, custom, and community convivial relations that exist in the north-west States, Nigeria. Through this, repentant youths noted for radicalism were reintegrated into the societies through historical connectivity, primordial loyalty, cultural and familial consanguinity in ensuring the fostering of communities' acceptance. These responses were received through traditional rulers who deem it to pardon them as a collective support through which final approval is received from the governments. This strategic response in no small measure assisted in the extenuation and obliteration of youths' radicalisation.

7. Traditional Institutions and Didactic Educational Reform Oversight:

It is axiomatic that education is a major pivot of any human societal advancement, through which meaningful developments are achieved. Autochthonous rulers in responses to the deradicalisation of youths' radicalisation exploited this strategy in moulding and remoulding youths against any forms of indecent character and behavioural systems. This has discernibly been manifested in established Islamic institutions through which vagaries of sermons are unleashed at daily and weekly congregational sessions. In addition, they ensure the dispensation of all-rounded and didactic knowledge through formal and informal educations inundating socio-cultural, economic, political and religious obligations of youths. Invariably, such impartation espouses the provision of informal knowledge acquired from the day of birth to the day of death given by individual parents. This is a common phenomenon among Muslims, while formal education, albeit with less currency, however also spawns uncommon transformational knowledge that makes the recipients more acceptable in a society. As a matter of fact, the institution managing education emplaces oversights on the integration of both formal and informal education systems by mainstreaming curricula to

undermine conditions and potentialities that fuel youths' radicalisation. For instance, in the north-west States, the implementation of Islamic alms (Zakat) and other endowment policies remain the fundamental contraption for amelioration of youth tendencies for crime and criminality that might spawn into radicalisation.

8. Traditional Institutions and Community Mobilisation of Youths:

It could be reiterated that the traditional institutions rulers are the chief security of their respective socio-political jurisdictions, and thus act as role models and community mobilisers. In the de-emphasis of youths' radicalisation, traditional rulers encouraged series of dialogues to ensure multiple perspectives in order to arrive at appropriate determinations. This remains one of the instrumentalities embedded by democratic polity in recognition of human rights, and has been a component part through which traditional rulers exhibit their administrative mettle. Albeit, since the emergence of democracy in 1999, there has been community mobilisation of youths against uncouth behaviour using the traditional institutions as the forerunner of grassroots governance. These are derived from advocacy and sensitisation campaigns through varied communities' social and cultural programmes where learned Islamic and Western educationists are deployed for moral talks.

9. Traditional Institutions and Local Vigilante Groups in Responses to Youths Radicalisation:

Since the usurpation of traditional institutions' power by the British imperialists, and its aggravation by democratic polity in 1999, arbitration of matters seemed to be the exclusive task of traditional institutions in rural communities. This is because the traditional rulers and the institutions are left to their destiny with minimal or sometimes no governance presence in the north-west communities. From 2011, this syndrome seemed to be more obvious, hence, the preponderant manifestation of youths' radicalisation had to be tackled by the erstwhile local vigilante groups cloned in distinct nomenclatures as Yan-tsintiri, Yan-banga, Yan-tauri, and Yan-sakai, among others. They are utilised to trickle down the youth radical menace. This, they ensure by maintaining law through arresting offenders and taking punitive measures. In the north-west States rural communities, the varied local vigilante groups created strong synergistic inter-security connectivity, invariably, a joint operation through mutual understanding by varied rural community leaders. They ensure events or crimes perpetrated in other States are made known through unbridled information dissemination in order to forestall possible or potential attacks as an early warning system. However, with democracy having a strong root in 2011, the incorporation and deployment of vigilante groups, not only by traditional rulers, became well-trusted security groups noted for articulate security activities by politicians and religious groups in Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina and Kano States. They made their impacts known in the arrest of offenders, and adduced punitive

measures using the collective connivance of extant law enforcement agencies. However, the traditional institutions were the major precursor in addressing crimes and criminalities with the tendency to de-escalate tension in the north-west States, Nigeria.

10. Youths Engagement in Historicised Justice and Reconciliation:

In stemming youths' radicalisation, traditional institutions engaged youths in historicised customary justice and reconciliatory expeditions in north-west States, Nigeria. Responsively, this involved the activities of Dan-Masani - a pageant historian who works in collectivisation with traditional institutions toward the extenuation of youths' radicalisation. This is unhesitatingly achieved through the incorporation of youths to historic griots' experiences of antiquated historicised customary justice and reconciliation. This constitutes recounting, learning, and disseminating values relative to crimes perpetrated for advanced transformative knowledge worthy of emulation by the younger generation. This strategic response prepared a sound-based resilience and framework for repositioning of youths' behavioural systems with the potential to forestall indignant characters that might engender radicalisation. Although, given youths' vibrant nature, brawniness, and exuberance, traditional institutions played, and still play, fundamental roles in dissuading youths from radicalisation acts. These are achievable because of their flexibility in yielding to issues, either positively or negatively. By and large, these traditional methods of dispute resolution deployed by autochthonous rulers align with cultural values that focus on restoration of peace, rather than retribution. This response aligns with Lederach's (1997) Conflict Transformation Theory, which asserts that lasting peace is founded on repairing relationships and fostering communal healing. In achieving this response, communities' historical relics are recounted in juxtaposition of cases for arbitration with samples and reverence made for better adjudication. Albeit, the promotion of youths' social cohesion and trust in inclusive decision-making through participation within communities of the multifarious north-west States. It is therefore evident that Nigeria has the potential vigour to extenuate youths' feelings of injustice, exclusion, and marginalisation.

11. Traditional Institutions in Community-Ethnic Based Recognition and Identifications:

The divine from creation institutionalised ethnic dichotomies among people for discernible identification and manifestation of His sublimity. This is inherent in multivariate human linguistic styles, ethnic and cultural identifications. With the 19th century British colonial phony proclamation, the philosophy of divide and rule accelerated it, and thus was the culmination of ethnic inclination and primordial loyalty. The historic United Nations Universal Declaration of 1947 recognises fundamental human rights in all ramifications, hence the

traditional rulers' promotion of ethnic identity and association or group, a precursor for manifestation of primordial loyalty. In the north-west States, indigenous rulers identify with varied extant ethnic communities residing within a given territorial area, such as the Fulani Miyatti-Allah, Zuru, Nupe, Igala, Idoma, Yoruba and Igbo, among others. This ethnic or community-based approach espoused high-level loyalty demonstrated in solving youth needs and aspirations from the grassroots, which ideals are transmitted to the younger generation. This development fostered strong unity and affinity, that thus leads to quick identification of conflict provenances as almost entire ethnic members are known to the rulers and the household heads and families. This strategy, to some extent polarised by exigency and imperativeness of democratic governance's fusion of all ethnic groups, however, its response to youths' radicalisation still subsists in rural and urban communities. From 1999 to 2025, the response mechanism in actualisation is essentially obvious in territories where community members' loyalties are divided between the duo of traditional and modern institutions like Kano, Zamfara, and Sokoto States.

Re-Strengthening Traditional Institutions: Potential Values to Radicalisation in North-West States, Nigeria

In a general synopsis, firstly, the north-west States require a proactive method in strengthening traditional institutions to counter youths and other radicalisation that will involve leveraging their deep-rooted community trust, recognition of constituted authority, and promotion of socio-cultural relevance to build resilience against violent ideologies. This strategy requires a formidable paradigm shift towards non-kinetic using established community-based led strategies involving religious leaders, traditional chiefs, subaltern chiefs, and elders towards promoting tolerance, mediation of conflicts, and providing inclusive positive narratives.

Secondly, transformative advocacy programmes and training of traditional and religious leaders in conflict resolution, dialogue techniques, and theological interpretations need to be ensconced to assist in countering youths' radicalisation in the north-west States, Nigeria. Besides, traditional institutions cum religious leaders need to be empowered to challenge the distorted and extremist narratives misused in religious and historical texts in legitimising youths' radicalisation in the study area. In actualisation of this strategy, the Dan-Masani - pageant historians who construe the dossiers of varied respective localities at the harem of traditional rulers - should be utilised for clarity of phenomena with the propensity to trigger youths' radicalisation in north-west States of Nigeria.

Thirdly, often sacrosanct is the engagement of local intermediaries by utilising the subaltern chiefs in conjunction with community-based local elders that are

ingenious about the environmental terrain of the north-west States. Again, the employing of trusted local actors to mediate between communities and State authorities will have the potential to facilitate dialogue with alienated groups in the realm of youths' radicalisation. In addition, this mechanism could be idealised by integrating traditional structures with community-based security building resilience in affected areas, or areas with potential vulnerability to youth radicalism.

Fourthly, the re-strengthening of the roles of traditional institutions could be achieved through the creation of social cohesion and fostering tolerance for diversity at the grassroots level of the multivariate north-west States, Nigeria. This acknowledgement of outright identification and recognition of varied ethnic groups will create the potential strength and values for deradicalisation of youths' vulnerability to radicalism. This stratagem tends to stimulate early warning systems by utilising traditional institutions' interpersonal knowledge to identify early signs of radicalisation and youth alienation.

Fifthly, the restrengthening of responses to youths' radicalisation in north-west States, Nigeria includes the creation of strong synergistic relations between traditional institutions and modern polity for collectivisation of security mechanisms implementation. This partnership will espouse the establishment of platforms for collaboration between traditional leaders, local government, law enforcement agencies, civil society, and community-based committees on youths' deradicalisation. The collaboration will tend to promote inclusivity in integrating formal and informal education. Again, the strengthening of traditional schooling systems to teach critical thinking and respect for diversity, preventing their use as breeding grounds for extremist ideology.

Sixthly, re-strengthening of traditional institutions' responses could also be deciphered in gender-sensitive approaches; this constitutes women leaders within traditional institutions to foster community peacebuilding and address gendered stereotypes. It is pertinent to note that engagement of youth in the activities of traditional institutions provides them with a sense of identity, belonging, and constructive purpose, thereby reducing their susceptibility to extremist recruitment into youths' radicalisation. Finally, the use of traditional institution mechanisms for conflict mediation to address community grievances prior to their exploitation by youth extremists will assist to a greater length in the extenuation of radicalised trends. These autochthonous efforts would be designed to complement complex and subtle security mechanisms by addressing the underlying causes of youths' radicalisation, such as perceived injustice, exclusion, and identity crises.

CONCLUSION

The chapter explored a chequered discourse on 'traditional institutions responses to youths' radicalisation in north-west States, Nigeria, 1999-c.2025', fundamentally the mechanisms applied for its extenuation, essentially with the adoption of democratic polity as an alternative to militarism. In its geographical realms, the north-west States is a geopolitical zone endowed with exponential population whose administrative systems are brokered within the convolution of autochthonous and modern governance pierced through the colonial epoch, and thus continues from 1999 to 2025. As a matter of fact, the remoteness of the north-west States' ungoverned forest areas and spaces poised for the precarious nature and manifestation of youths' radicalisation. This deplorable ecological ambience was exacerbated by numbers of external and internal forces, such as the fragility of democratic governance and the upsurge in illegal gold mining in Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Kano, and Zamfara States that changed the governance system. This historical rhetoric has humongous implication on governance systems, hence the need for the re-strengthening of traditional institutions' principles and precepts with the potential values to stem youth radicalisation, among others.

Incontrovertibly, the study revealed that traditional institutions' responses to youths' radicalisation in north-west States had since the precolonial period been monarchical in nature, enthusiastically coordinated by Sarakunas (kings) and immeasurably assisted by subaltern chiefs such as the Waziri (viceroy), Galadima (palace officer), Yari (comptroller of prison), and Alkali (judge), among others. In addition to responses to youths' radicalisation, they utilised autochthonous conflict resolution strategies such as lashes with a cudgel or horse tail, fines, and banishment of offenders. This is actually done in strengthening peace and harmonious relations in north-west States, Nigeria.

Furthermore, traditional institutions' responses assisted in the curtailment of youths' radicalisation up to the British subjugation of northern Nigeria in 1903 by churning out an 'indirect rule' colonial system that indirectly shrank extant indigenous power. With the transition to democracy in 1999, the north-west States as a geopolitical zone experienced dreadful youths' radicalisation in exponential dimensions and degrees through neglect and marginalisation, that ultimately resulted in the exploitation of youths' credulities. However, the study recommended the re-strengthening of traditional institutions' responses to youths' radicalisation using improved mechanisms derived fundamentally from the underlying triggering forces. These encompass the creation of strong synergistic relations between traditional institutions and modern governance systems, strong advocacy and sensitisation campaigns, youth empowerment and inclusiveness in traditional polity, historicisation of customary judiciary

reconciliation, and the promotion of formal and informal education to stimulate youths' critical thinking, among others.

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